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RETURN OR RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL PROPERTY TO THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN
QUESTION OF CYPRUS
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fiftieth year

Letter dated 30 November 1995 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 28 November 1995, addressed to you by Mr. Osman Ertuğ, representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 22, 55 and 112, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hüseyin E. ÇELEM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 28 November 1995 from Mr. Osman Ertuğ to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Governments, I have the honour to respond to the new allegations put forward by the Greek Cypriot Representative at the United Nations in connection with cultural property in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which come in the form of a letter distributed as General Assembly and Security Council document A/50/738-S/1995/938 dated 8 November 1995, and a statement made at the plenary meeting of the General Assembly held on 27 November 1995.

At the outset I wish to remind the Greek Cypriot side that there is no "occupation" in Cyprus other than the 32-year-old occupation of the seat of Government by the Greek Cypriot usurpers of power, and to stress that their continued monopolization and reckless exploitation of that power as a "cold war weapon" against the Turkish Cypriot side is the main obstacle in the way of the negotiating process and intercommunal reconciliation.

Greek Cypriot allegations on "systematic destruction" of cultural property in the North have been conclusively refuted not only by the Turkish Cypriot side, but also by independent sources, including a UNESCO expert and the relevant Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

In a letter he wrote to the London Times, the respected UNESCO expert, Mr. Jacques Dalibard, who had visited Cyprus twice in 1975, observed that "there was no systematic and organized looting of the cultural heritage of Cyprus. And on the whole, considering that a war took place, the losses are small".

On the other hand, Mr. Ymenus van der Werff, General Rapporteur of the Subcommittee on the Architectural and Artistic Heritage of the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe, who had come to the island with a delegation of experts to study the situation regarding cultural property in both parts of the island, reported the following on this subject in paragraph 5.3 of his report, which was published as a document of the Council of Europe on 2 July 1989 under the symbol AS/CULT/AA(41)1: "We saw no churches destroyed though St. George in Limnia (in the North) was listed as such".

Contrary to what is claimed, it is the Greek Cypriot side which has always tried, and continues to try, to eradicate all traces of the Turkish-Muslim heritage of Cyprus, particularly during the years 1963-1974, when they attempted to "cleanse" the island of its ethnic Turkish population through massacre, expulsion and other methods of intimidation. During that tragic period, mosques, shrines and other places of Muslim worship in 103 villages across the island had been destroyed, including the historic Grand Mosque in the southern town of Paphos. The following quotation on this subject taken from the aforementioned Council of Europe report is sad, yet revealing:

"5.3 We noted with regret the complete destruction of the main mosque in Paphos. The whole area has since been flattened to give way for a widened road junction and a car park. There is no memorial to the existence of the mosque. Below the road a Turkish bath complex remains hidden in rubble and vegetation awaiting restoration. The Turkish Cypriot cemetery by the nearby St. Sophia Mouttalos mosque is dilapidated."

Today, the Greek Cypriot side continues to show utter contempt for what is left of the Turkish-Islamic heritage in southern Cyprus. For instance, the historic Bayraktar Mosque on the ancient walls of Nicosia, which is located in the Greek sector of the city, and which had been repeatedly attacked and bombed before 1974, has again been the target of several bombing and arson attacks since then. The reason is that the mosque stands as a symbol of the centuries-old Turkish-Islamic heritage of the island, and a powerful reminder that Cyprus is not a Greek island.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the Greek Cypriot side is in no position to lodge complaints about the condition of cultural property in the North. It is the Greek Cypriot side which has systematically attacked, destroyed or treated with utter disrespect cultural and religious monuments, places of worship and other elements of cultural belonging to the Turkish-Muslim heritage of the island.

As for individual acts of vandalism or theft, this is a world-wide phenomenon affecting all countries and, ironically, southern Cyprus more than northern Cyprus. Foreign experts have attributed this in part to the existence of a lucrative stolen art market in the economically affluent South, which naturally attracts stolen objets d'art from across the island. For their part, the authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, aware of its value for humanity as a whole, have done and continue to do their best to protect and preserve all cultural property of the North regardless of its cultural origin, in spite of the lack of any assistance from relevant international organizations.

It is also relevant to note, in connection with cultural property, that at a more fundamental level, that is at the level of educating their young generations to respect the culture of others, the Greek Cypriot side has dismally failed by instilling, in the minds of their young, nothing but hatred, intolerance and contempt towards the distinct cultural and ethnic identity of the Turkish Cypriot community. In fact, the level of anti-Turkish indoctrination in elementary, secondary and higher schools in the Greek Cypriot South is nothing short of racism.

Most recently, this has again manifested itself in violent mass demonstrations staged by Greek Cypriot schoolchildren between the ages of 13 and 18 who marched to our borders, uttering anti-Turkish slogans, burning Turkish flags and stoning and injuring our border guards as well as civilians. Since hardly any of these students have even met a Turkish Cypriot in their lives, their anger and hatred cannot be other than the result of indoctrination by their teachers, parents, the Greek Orthodox Church and the entire education system.

I am sure you will appreciate that the poisoning of young minds in the manner described above, whose adverse effects will no doubt be felt for generations to come, is both a tragic waste and a testament to the inability of the other side to live peacefully, side by side, with their Turkish Cypriot neighbours, for a better future for all.

I should be grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 22, 55 and 112, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Osman ERTUĞ
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus